TOWN AND VILLAGE E-MAIL SUBSCRIPTIONS POLICY

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HISTORY AND PURPOSE

The Town of Rhinebeck has been broadcasting town news and information to residents via e-mail for several years. The Web Site Committee is calling these e-mail broadcasts *e-mail subscriptions*.

As of March 2008, there are two e-mail subscriptions – the Town E-Mail Group and the Town Recreation Newsletter.

This policy provides guidelines for a lawful, ethical, effective and efficient town e-mail subscriptions program.

The Web Site Committee (Committee) has assumed a stewardship and advisory role for e-mail subscriptions because the Web site and e-mail subscriptions serve a similar function – they broadcast news and information electronically. They also coordinate and reinforce one another – sites that use e-mail to drive traffic are generally more successful than those that don't, and visitors expect to sign up and manage an e-mail subscription through the Web site.

On Dec. 31, 2007, the Committee safely transferred the Town E-Mail Group subscriber base from former Town Supervisor Steve Block to the Web site, notified Supervisor Tom Traudt about the transfer, and delivered a printed copy of the subscriber base to Town Clerk Barbara Cunningham. The printed copy of the subscriber base included instructions regarding Freedom of Information Law requests to access the list. Town Hall has been in full possession of the Town E-Mail Group since Dec. 31, 2007.

As temporary custodians of the Town E-Mail Group, the Committee has offered to send e-mails to subscribers until designated Town Hall representatives are properly trained.

E-mail subscriptions do not include inter- or intra-governmental e-mail. The Web Site Committee recommends that the Technology Committee have oversight of and/or make recommendations for official town and village e-mail accounts for employees, elected officials and other government representatives.

WEB SITE AND E-MAIL SUBSCRIPTIONS

The Web Site Committee recognizes that e-mail subscriptions are an important new public outreach tool for the Town and Village. E-mail subscriptions support the Web Site Committee's mission to:

- Inform, educate and communicate town and village business
- Assist and encourage participation in community decision-making and civic life

- Help improve responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency of public employees, volunteers and officials

The Web Site Committee recommends centralizing e-mail subscriptions through the Web site because:

- Subscribers expect to sign up for and manage an e-mail subscription on the Web site
- Subscribers can sign up for all Town- and Village-sponsored news in one place
- It allows the Town and Village to offer a well defined privacy policy covering all subscriptions
- Eliminates the need to coordinate subscription changes across lists

MANAGING E-MAIL SUBSCRIPTIONS

The Committee recommends appointing a Subscription Manager for each subscription. The Subscription Manager is responsible for receiving and processing content, adding names to the subscriber list that are gathered via sign-in sheets, and sending e-mails. Managing an e-mail subscription will take one to several hours a week. Town Board and Village Board should plan accordingly to manage these tasks. The Web Site Committee will help with overflow and technical issues, but as volunteers should not be relied upon to manage e-mail subscriptions.

CONTENT GUIDELINES

Each subscription should have a clear description of the types of content to be distributed to the list, and the anticipated frequency of e-mails. Subscriptions will only contain news and information and maintain a consistent style. **Subscriptions must not include attachments, but may include links to documents posted on the Web site.**

All departments, committees, and other official bodies of the Town and Village may submit items for inclusion in the Town E-Mail Group subscription.

The Town E-Mail Group Subscription Manager shall send *all* acceptable submissions from Town and Village departments and committees in a timely manner (see Examples of Acceptable Submissions below). The Town E-Mail Group Subscription Manager shall not refuse to send content that meets the content guidelines.

The Subscription Manager will also consider all reasonable and acceptable requests from other municipalities (village, county) and the Rhinebeck Central School District.

The Web Site Committee will advise Subscription Managers, Town Board, Village Board, committees and departments regarding:

- adding, deleting, combining and splitting subscriptions
- appropriate content
- preparing content for e-mail

- proper formatting
- good subject lines
- timing and coordination of e-mails
- standard e-mail etiquette

Examples of Acceptable Submissions

- Official town business
- Official village business
- Town- and village-sponsored events
- School notices
- Legal notices
- Policy notice/reminder
- Meeting notices
- Meeting agendas
- Meeting minutes
- Notice of official document availability – online or by mail or in person
- Change in office hours, hours of operation, holiday schedules, special hours, etc.
- Job openings and volunteer opportunities
- Other content recommended by departments and committees and approved by a majority of the Town Board or Village Board, depending on which entity has jurisdiction

Examples of Unacceptable Submissions
- Political content
- Opinions
- Personal commentary
- Fundraising
- Commercial advertisements or information

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS
The Web Site Committee recommends the following minimum technology requirements for managing subscription e-mails:

- Subscribers must be able to sign up and manage subscriptions on their own in one place
- E-mails must offer subscribers a clear way to opt-out within the e-mail
- Must protect www.rhinebeck-ny.gov from being marked as a spammer
- Must support multiple administrators
- Must support multiple e-mail subscriptions
- Must manage bounce-backs
- Ensure high level of deliverability
- Administrators must be able to search the subscriber database and manually change records
- Low cost

Other options to consider are:

- Ability to schedule messaging in advance
- Basic reporting such as bounce-backs and open rates
- Public archive of subscription e-mails
- RSS feeds
- Spam checker

These requirements and options may change over time.

RECRUITING SUBSCRIBERS

We recommend that the Town and Village encourage subscribers sign up on the Web site
or via a sign-in sheet at events in Town or Village Halls. Names should be delivered to
the Subscription Manager regularly and entered into the system as soon as possible.